

Stabilizing SCDMH's direct care workforce

Though SCDMH has for several years identified recruiting and retaining a qualified workforce as being among its biggest challenges, the pandemic continues to make its workforce situation much worse.

Despite the implementation of the recent general 2.5% salary increase, and a planned additional salary increase using funding appropriated to SCDMH in its FY 2022 State budget, the agency is requesting that \$9,250,000 of American Rescue Plan funds be set aside for recruitment and retention bonuses for its critical direct care staff, specifically to be used for its nursing positions – BHAs, CNAs, LPNs and RNs – in its hospitals and nursing homes, and for its Masters prepared therapists (MHPs) in its community mental health centers.

Pursuant to Proviso 117.63, State agencies may spend up to \$10,000 per employee annually to recruit and retain employees in critical needs jobs. There are approximately 450 nursing care positions* which SCDMH has identified as critical in SCDMH operated hospitals and nursing homes. There are approximately 1400 MHP positions* in the community mental health centers which SCDMH has identified as critical. (**occupied, as well as currently vacant*) Full funding of the maximum \$10,000 per position would cost up to \$18,500,000. The agency is requesting one-half that amount -- \$9,250,000.

Inpatient Facilities

- The number of available employee nursing staff -- behavioral health assistants (BHAs), CNAs, LPNs and RNs -- at SCDMH has significantly declined during the pandemic. Vacancy rates have increased and the volume of call outs and non-productive time have increased.
- Despite using one-time agency funds for a bonus for BHAs and CNAs during FY 2021, and the implementation of the recent general 2.5% salary increase, the agency continues to lose inpatient direct care nursing staff to employers in the private sector.
- Health systems are vying for nurses and CNAs with five-figure signing bonuses, and higher wages now offered in the manufacturing and retail sectors are also a factor in its loss of BHAs.
- Prior to the pandemic, the average daily census in SCDMH's 2 adult civil psychiatric hospitals was 275 patients. Due to fewer number of available nursing staff, the current average daily census is 210 patients, a nearly 25% decline.
- Prior to the pandemic, the average daily census at its C.M. Tucker, Jr. Nursing Care Center was 254. As of this week the combined census at Tucker was 177, a 30% decline.
- Unless SCDMH is able to stabilize its current inpatient nursing workforce, it will have to further reduce the capacity of its hospitals and Tucker to maintain safe levels of staffing for its patients and nursing home residents.

Community Mental Health Centers

- Through its community mental health centers, SCDMH endeavors to provide a comprehensive array of mental health treatment services for adults, children and their families.
- Critical to the capacity of community mental health centers to deliver services are its Masters prepared therapists (MHPs), who provide the bulk of the direct care to Center patients.
- Staff turnover in SCDMH community mental health centers which averaged approximately 15% annually prior to the pandemic, jumped to over 28% in FY 2021, increasing the number of vacant positions and correspondingly the caseloads of the remaining staff.
- Despite the implementation of the recent general increase, the agency continues to lose MHPs, further jeopardizing the centers ability to provide needed services.